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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON THE VISIT OF SECRETARY OF DEFENSE DONALD H. RUMSFELD TO HONDURAS, AUGUST 20, 2003

1. Editorial in Tegucigalpa-based moderate daily "El Herald" on 8/22 entitled "Anti-drug base". "If the U.S. were to set up a base with the exclusive purpose of fighting against the terrible threat of narcotrafficking, it would help stop the operations of drug mafias that use Honduran territory as a bridge to transport the coke demanded by the growing American population of drug addicts. Besides, it will hinder the corruption generated by this illegal activity and the risk of Honduras becoming a narco-state. Definitely, it could prevent a lot of suffering in the future for us."

"Thus, it's not odd that the visits of high ranking officials of the U.S. government, such as the CJCS General Richard Myers and the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld may have had the goal of negotiating the installation of a center to fight against narcotrafficking. These visits could also be aimed at achieving the support of the Honduran society for this undertaking."

"Until we see if there will be such a base or not, we hope the U.S. government increases its support to its Honduran counterpart in the fight against narcotrafficking, because the huge economic resources this illegal activity generates greatly surpass our limited capabilities to confront it. Obviously, the U.S. can do a lot more than just give money, helicopters and state-of-the-art technology to fight drugs; it has the power to eradicate these mafias for good: it only has to stop its millions of drug addicts from buying heroin and cocaine, and end the laundering of billions of narco-dollars that its financial system does."

2. Editorial in San Pedro Sula-based liberal daily "La Prensa" on 8/22 entitled "Gratitude?". "The visit of the U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld just a few days after CJCS General Richard Myers came to Honduras doesn't add up with the official explanation given as the goal of both visits. Previous experience leads us to think that they entailed much more than expressing the gratitude of the U.S. government, no matter how real and sincere it appears to be."

"What were the issues discussed with President Maduro? The press conference given by the President and his distinguished visitor concentrated on issues we already knew about and which have been discussed repeatedly between our two governments."

"We don't disregard the fight against drug trafficking, as we don't think we're immune to terrorism. We need to carry on with the joint efforts with the international community to confront these threats that have increased poverty and misery in Honduras."

3. Today's edition of San Pedro Sula-based daily "La Prensa", ran on its front page headline "Maduro requests concrete support from the U.S.": I would like to see from our North American friends a change in its policy, and a consequent and effective fight against narcotrafficking". Also in the same article he clarified some headlines of yesterday's newspapers, which stated that during the visits of CJCS General Richard Myers and Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, the U.S. and Honduras had negotiations to establish an anti-drug base in Honduras.

Regarding this issue, Maduro stated "It's not true, they (General Myers and Secretary Rumsfeld and their delegations) came for a very simple reason, to thank the Honduran people for our support by sending troops for the pacification and reconstruction in Iraq. There was nothing more."

4. Article in Tegucigalpa-based moderate daily "El Herald" on 8/22 entitled "It would be an excellent idea." "Armida de Lopez Contreras, Vice-president of Honduras and President of the National Council Against Narcotrafficking said that it would be an excellent idea to establish an anti-drug base in Honduras."

"Several Honduran political leaders have said that we need more determined assistance from the U.S. in the fight against narcotrafficking. Lopez Contreras stated, 'I believe that is the opinion of all politicians'."

Palmer